

JAMA OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

**Rockefeller University
New York, NY
August 7, 2000**

Meeting Summary

The JAMA Oversight Committee (JOC) met on August 7, 2000, at 10:30 a.m. at Rockefeller University. In attendance were JOC members Joshua Lederberg, Ph.D. (Interim Chair), Christine Cassel, MD, David A. Kessler, MD, JD, Joshua Lederberg, Ph.D., Kenneth Shine, MD, Roy Pitkin, MD, William M. Passano, Jr., and Robert A. Mussacchio, Ph.D. Also in attendance were Catherine DeAngelis, MD, JAMA Editor-in-Chief, and AMA staff Robert L Kennett, VP Publishing, and Erma Long, Manager, VP Publishing Office.

The JOC examined a variety of issues relating to the JAMA Editorial Governance Plan, the role and structure of the JOC, the criteria for evaluation of the JAMA Editor-in-Chief, and the JOC meeting schedule.

The Role and Structure of the JOC

The role and structure of the JOC was discussed in light of a comprehensive review of the governance of the AMA, as well as the structure of the editorial and publishing staffs.

Members of the JOC were introduced and provided background and interests related to serving on the JOC. It was determined that the following terms of service had been established for each current member of the JOC:

Christine Cassel, MD – 3 years
David A. Kessler, MD, JD – 2 years
Joshua Lederberg, Ph.D. – 1 year
Ken Shine, MD – 3 years
Roy Pitkin, MD – 2 years
William M. Passano, Jr. – 1 year
Robert A. Mussacchio, Ph.D. – 1 year

The Committee unanimously elected Joshua Lederberg, Ph.D. as Chairman of the JOC.

The Committee recommended and approved taking minutes at each JOC meeting. Following the meeting, a draft summary will be prepared and circulated to all members for their review.

The role of the JOC was discussed as having three dimensions:

- To evaluate the JAMA Editor-in-Chief.
- To act as a buffer between the JAMA Editor-in-Chief and the AMA with anticipatory responsibility to head off problems.
- To examine the structure & functions of the journal, and recommend changes as warranted.

Editorial Control & Management

There was a spirited discussion about the role of the JOC in ensuring the editorial independence of the AMA journals. The Committee agreed that editorial independence should include total editorial control by the Editor, and that no actions on the part of the AMA or JAMA should create the perception that the Editor's control has in any way been compromised. Of particular concern was the potential blurring of the distinction of the AMA and JAMA as separate, important, and powerful brands as a result of promotion and media events.

The Committee decided that the principles of editorial control should be clearly stated. As a result, the JOC prepared the following draft statement of principle.

The JOC strongly supports the decision of the AMA House of Delegates and Board of Trustees to maintain and sustain the editorial and scientific independence of the JAMA. In this regard, the JOC believes that this independence must be reflected in the content and methodologies by which the contents of the Journal are communicated to the media and the public.

The JOC believes that the content of all press and public releases based on the contents of the journal, be solely in the discretion of the Editor-in-Chief (subject to providing information to the AMA Communications office). The public and media contacts should be conducted by Communications specialists who are employed full-time for this purpose. Such specialists should be recruited jointly by the AMA Communications office and the Editor-in-Chief of JAMA, but should be assigned to work solely on JAMA activities so that there is no confusion about for whom they speak. The AMA Communications office should be informed of any information to be released.

Press conferences based on JAMA content should be under the control of the Editor-in-Chief. Press conferences for the AMA should be conducted by its executive leadership. From time to time, joint press conferences may be appropriate by mutual consent of the Editor-in-Chief and the Executive leadership of the AMA.

Criteria for Evaluating the JAMA Editor-in-Chief

The Committee will review and evaluate the JAMA Editor-in-Chief's performance on an annual basis. During the evaluation, the JOC will take the critical objectives of JAMA and ask the Editor-in-Chief to critique them. The JOC will assess the overall performance of the Editor-in-Chief, and will include recommendations from the Committee. The group stressed that AMA management must inform them of the disposition of their recommendations.

In order to carry out its role, the Committee requested the following from the JAMA Editor-in-Chief:

- To create a new **System To Evaluate Performance Form (STEPform)**, which would include the items listed on the Governance Plan, and a connection between the Editor-in-Chief and the JOC as a primary objective.
- From the STEPform key objectives, indicate the highest areas of priorities.
- Provide a report to the JOC, prior to its next meeting, that covers the overall health of the journal. Include information on the renewal rate over the past 3–4 years, subscription rate, market share, impact factor, acceptance rate, number of articles submitted, and how the journal has done with medical students and other special groups.
- Provide information on the length of time to review articles for the journal. (The Committee suggested that this information be published in JAMA sometime in the future.)

There was a good deal of discussion about the appropriateness of the JOC making recommendations regarding the salary or bonus payments for the Editor. However, since the JOC report is identified as the first level of bonus payment for the Editor in her current agreement, during the first review, the Committee will make a recommendation as to whether the performance would warrant payment of the agreed upon bonus amount. The Committee emphasized that their evaluation will only be done as a threshold to obtaining the bonus. They will evaluate whether the minimum bonus criteria have been met, knowing that the evaluation may not equal the negotiated percentage of the Editor's bonus.

While the JOC was reluctant to get into the issue of salary, the Committee recommended that AMA senior management submit a proposal for any salary changes to the JOC for review, prior to finalizing.

Role of the Editor-in-Chief

The JAMA Editor-in-Chief is responsible for informing the JOC of any major plans for the journal, and to report the status of implementing these plans to the Committee. The goals of the Editor-in-Chief are as follows:

- To maintain the editorial independence of the journal.
- To advance the social consciousness of JAMA readership through the articles published.
- Get as many high-ranking people to publish in JAMA as possible.
- Publish more articles on women and children issues to obtain more balance.
- Improve the patient page on the web.
- Continue accepting electronic submissions of manuscripts. JAMA Express has improved turnaround time to 4–6 weeks for specific manuscripts.
- To provide the best possible medical, scientific journal, taking reasonable account of revenue outcomes.

The JOC requested an electronic version of the proposed criteria, including a report on the status of achieving the goals.

Editor-in-Chief Review Process

The Committee agreed that comments would be solicited from the JAMA Editorial Board for consideration in its review of the Editor-in-Chief, but not from the Editor's direct reporting staff. A questionnaire would be developed for that purpose. Dr. Roy Pitkin, Dr. Christine Cassel, and Dr. Ken Shine were appointed to prepare a draft questionnaire for the Committee's review. The Committee agreed to take some time to fully consider the purview of the JOC.

The draft will be circulated to the JOC to review and finalize.

JOC Timeline & Due Dates

The Chairman set the following timeline for meetings and receipt of requested materials:

- October 1, 2000 – 3-year plan from the Editor-in-Chief due to Chairman.
- January 31, 2001 – Evaluation of Editor-in-Chief will be completed.
- After January 31, 2001 – The next meeting of the JOC will be held once the Editor's evaluation is completed. The meeting location will be Chicago, IL.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Next Steps

Editor-in-Chief:

Create a new step form.

§ From the Stepform key objectives, indicate the highest areas of priorities.

- Provide a report to the JOC, prior to its next meeting, that covers the overall health of the journal. Include information on the renewal rate over the past 3–4 years, subscription rate, market share, and how the journal has done with medical students and other special groups.
- Provide information on the length of time to review articles for the journal. (The Committee suggested that this information be published in JAMA sometime in the future.)

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Staff

The JOC agreed that AMA staff would provide financial information on a quarterly basis, which will compare current results against budgets and previous years. As stated in the Editorial Governance Plan, "the JOC will have full access to financial information including revenue and expense statements, budgets, and actual results after each member of the JOC has signed AMA's standard Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Agreements."